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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TEGUCIGALPA 002038

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STATE FOR G, DRL/PHD, S/P, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND WHA/CEN  
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAM AND DCHA/DG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/30/2015

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: DEMOCRACY PROMOTION STRATEGIES FOR HONDURAS:

NOVEMBER 27 GENERAL ELECTIONS KEY TO DEMOCRATIZATION

REF: A. STATE 169581

- [1](#)B. STATE 156961
- [1](#)C. TEGUCIGALPA 1987
- [1](#)D. TEGUCIGALPA 1643
- [1](#)E. TEGUCIGALPA 886
- [1](#)F. FY2007 MISSION PROGRAM PLAN
- [1](#)G. 04 TEGUCIGALPA 1701
- [1](#)H. (ALL NOTAL)

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs, a.i. James Williard;  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Post is providing suggested democracy promotion strategies for the next six to eight months, keyed to questions in ref A. Post emphasizes the importance of the November 27 general elections and January 2006 transition to a new president/vice president, congress, and municipal governments. The promotion of Democratic Systems and Practices is the number one strategic goal of Post's Mission Program Plan (MPP) for FY2007 (ref F), as it was in the FY2006 MPP, and many of the issues discussed in this cable are also discussed in the FY2007 MPP.

a. Identify the key areas of democratic deficit and the 3-5 most important desired outcomes over the next 6-8 months:

Areas of democratic deficit

- Deeply entrenched patronage culture.
- General acceptance/apathy for corruption along with little or no respect for laws from all levels.
- Weak civil society.
- An economic and political environment controlled by a small group of political/economic elites.
- Lack of political will at all levels of the national government.
- Lack of implementations of laws.

Desired outcomes

- Political and economic change through reform and implementation of the electoral laws; introduce new political leadership through November 27 national elections for president, congress, and municipalities.
- Support and promote reforms within the new Congress by new, uncorrupted legislators; support legislative reform.
- Strengthen coalitions of civil society, including professional associations that can push for reforms from inside and outside government.
- Facilitate greater transparency to the legal system; strengthen the implementation of the Criminal Procedure Code; facilitate the passage and implementation of a new Civil Procedure Code and other laws that negate old practices that promoted corruption and cronyism.

b. Outline a 6-month diplomatic and programmatic strategy to achieve the outcomes:

In Honduras, democratic institutions are not mature enough to prevent abuses of power, which are often significant. Political and economic power is concentrated in a small elite that does not countenance the emergence of economic challengers or accept that a rising tide would lift all ships. In a very real sense, Honduras is a captured state. Elite manipulation of the public sector, particularly the weak legal system, has turned it into a tool to protect the powerful. Other citizens are left defenseless on a wide range of governance issues, and dramatic social inequities are maintained and reinforced, impacting the most vulnerable populations. The widespread distortions of democratic processes in Honduras create formidable barriers to sustainable economic development and poverty reduction. Although elections are considered free and fair, voters choose mainly between the two major entrenched political parties, both beholden to the interests of individuals from the same economic elite. The political system is focused more on party loyalty and interests than on the government's responsiveness to citizens. Corruption and cronyism reinforce a general lack of democratic legitimacy and a widespread perception of inequities in governance, allowing widespread crime and violence to flourish and threaten public security. Frustration, cynicism and apathy have mounted among citizens, particularly in rural areas, as people see

little positive impact on their lives from continued political promises and pronouncements on reform.

Addressing these challenges facing democracy in Honduras requires an integrated strategy that will give people the means to influence public policy, push for transparency and accountability in government, and reinforce the operation of checks and balances. Traditional, top-down reform, induced by international diplomats and donors alone, will not be effective in addressing underlying problems of political manipulation, corruption and lack of transparency. Partnerships developed with local government and broad stakeholder-based civil society efforts, including efforts within institutions by professional associations, will be critical in promoting, achieving, and sustaining responsive and accountable governance.

The following interventions over the next six months will strengthen these longer-term efforts at building a sustainable, democratic foundation:

- Support implementation of the electoral reforms and post-election efforts by civil society to inform the public.
- Support and strengthen role of civil society.
- Support reform-minded legislators and fund legislative strengthening activities such as introducing legislative interns, legislative research, and sending new legislators on International Visitor Programs (IVPs).
- Support fora addressing legal reforms, including guest speakers and high-level USG visitors.
- Support fora disseminating findings by host country entities on democracy and governance surveys.

c. Identify major needs from the Department of State or other parts of the USG, including resources, high-level visits, public diplomacy-related efforts, that would support accomplishing these objectives:

- Funds to support voter education and domestic and international election observation missions to combat election fraud (see refs C, D, F, and G).
- Follow up initiatives by civil society after the elections to strengthen the electoral laws and political party finance oversight.
- Funding to support civil society fora, including high-level USG visits, to support key democratic reforms and exchange with other Latin American countries; these can help bring pressure on national authorities to move forward with reforms.
- Support the dissemination of democracy and governance surveys (such as the USAID's LAC/CAM Regional DG Survey) that raise the awareness of the public, media and governments to core democracy issues (such as corruption, confidence in government, etc.).

d. Identify major impediments, including resource, political, or structural, to accomplishing these outcomes:

- Funding. Post has repeatedly requested funds to support voter education and domestic election observation efforts to combat election fraud (see refs C, D, F, and G). Post received partial funding of these requests prior to the February primary elections but has yet to receive anything for the November general elections.
- Honduran political will.
- Shortage of staff in U.S. Mission offices. The position of Deputy Political Chief/Labor Attache is currently vacant due to the "Iraq tax" and will remain vacant until being filled in summer 2006. This is despite the fact that during the 2005-06 time frame there are national elections and a transition to a new government.

e. Identify other countries, organizations or groups which have significant influence on the host government or elements of the society that can contribute significantly (positive or negative) to democratization efforts:

- Civil society, municipal associations, and professional associations.
- Peer groups from other Latin American countries, particularly in the justice sector.
- International donors. For example, Japan and Taiwan have programs which indirectly effect the implementation of democracy and the affect of USG programs.
- Cuba: the infiltration of Cuban doctors and scholarships for Hondurans to attend medical school in Cuba in both cases exposes Hondurans to GOC communist ideology and is a significant negative contribution for democratization efforts. (See forthcoming septel for more information on Cuban doctors.)
- Venezuela: alleged funding of leftist organizations and political movements in Honduras is a negative contribution. (See ref E for details.)
- Drug money: profits from narcotics smuggling alleged to be funding political campaigns on both sides of the aisle.

f. Identify the key areas of democracy promotion supported by

the host government, including engagement in international or regional organizations, and bilateral support. Identify areas in which the host-government's policies undermine or run contrary to the USG's democracy promotion policy:

#### Key areas of democracy promotion

##### Supported

- Allowed Organization of American States Election Observation Mission (EOM) and domestic NGO EOM during February primary elections to promote transparency by having, in the field, international and domestic election observers. GOH set to do the same for November general elections.
- GOH is an active participant in the OAS and its associated institutions and the UN and its associated institutions on democracy and human rights.
- Honduran Minister of Defense has signed the SOUTHCOM Human Rights Consensus Document, which formally acknowledges that the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) are bound to and supportive of all national and international instruments on human rights to which Honduras is a party. By having signed the Human Rights Consensus Document, the HOAF becomes eligible for formal SOUTHCOM human rights training, and assistance in developing and implementing a HOAF human rights program. This initiative has had the personal support of the Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in all phases to date.
- HOAF are fully subordinated to their democratically elected civilian leadership, consistent with the rule of law, and played a key role in the primaries in securing election materials.

##### Undermined

- Lack of political will to combat corruption - failure to provide resources for investigators, internal affairs, auditors; strong political interference with justice system (police, prosecutors, and judges).
- Disregard for laws at all levels of society.
- Rampant corruption.
- Insufficient funding for institutions key to democratization, such as the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), Public Ministry, etc..

g. Evaluate the consequences of pursuing this proactive reform agenda in the host country:

##### Support and strengthen electoral reforms:

- Reduce the excessive control exerted by political/economic elites over the country by making legislative representatives more accountable to their electorate.
- Educate and strengthen the electorate's knowledge of their role and responsibilities.
- Strengthen electoral authorities in making the elections and political parties more transparent and accountable.

##### Strengthening civil society and professional associations:

- Create sustainable foundation for reform that rests with the stakeholders in the country.
- Provide the people with the means to influence public policy, push for transparency and accountability in government, and reinforce the operation of checks and balances; increase their ability to withstand political intervention.
- Engage the people in taking on their role and responsibilities in a democracy.

The Embassy has been and will continue to pursue a proactive reform agenda, not only on democracy and human rights, but also on other issues that have the goal of helping Honduras become a more democratic country, with greater respect for human rights and the rule, less corruption, and increased economic growth and opportunity. Post aims to ensure that Honduran democracy seeks the best interests of all Hondurans, and not just the privileged elite.

Williard